

Furman Magazine

Volume 45
Issue 2 *Summer* 2002

Article 24

6-1-2002

Different strokes

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Recommended Citation

Moore, Vince (2002) "Different strokes," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 2 , Article 24.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol45/iss2/24>

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Different strokes

Paladin tennis stars earn All-America recognition

By their own admission, Furman roommates John Chesworth and James Cameron couldn't be more different.

For starters, they grew up in different countries — Chesworth in England and Cameron in Zimbabwe. Cameron is neat and highly organized; Chesworth favors a more cluttered existence. They say that if you visited their North Village apartment, you would have no trouble discerning exactly where Cameron's half of the room ends and Chesworth's begins.

Cameron is also as good a student as you'll find at Furman. He maintains a 3.94 grade-point average in health and exercise science, has been awarded both the Furman Bisher Scholarship (which goes to the student-athlete with the highest grade-point average) and W. Chapman Smith Scholarship, and may attend medical school after graduation. As for Chesworth, he has done his part to disprove the theory that there is nothing to do at Furman but study all the time.

Their differences translate to the tennis court, where Chesworth plays No. 1 singles for the Paladins and Cameron plays No. 2 — and where they comprise the first All-American doubles team in school history.

Cameron says he is the "steady" one who can be counted on to keep the ball in play and not make mistakes. Chesworth doesn't mind taking chances and often hits the big shot that puts the other team away.

Despite their disparate personalities, they form a perfect bond on and off the tennis court. "I think it's that combination that has allowed us to be a good team," Cameron says. "We're very different, but we complement each other well and we enjoy playing together."

The duo proved their doubles mettle this spring when they received a last-minute invitation to play in the NCAA tournament at College Station, Texas. Although they had been nationally ranked in doubles earlier in the fall, Furman failed to qualify for the NCAA tournament and, as a result, their stock fell in the rankings.

"They were an alternate team for the doubles," says Furman tennis coach Paul Scarpa. "But then a few teams had injuries and they got the call to play just a few days before the tournament started."

Chesworth was prepared to go because he had been invited to play in the tournament's singles competition (he lost in the first round to Southern Cal's Nick Rainey, 7-5, 2-6, 6-4). But Furman's season had been over for nearly a month, and Cameron was back in "regular student" mode. Still, after a few days of practice they knew they were ready.

They opened the 32-team competition with a 6-3, 6-7, 6-0 victory over a duo from Tulsa, then advanced to the quarterfinals and earned All-America status with a 6-4, 6-1 victory over UCLA's Tobias Clemens and Lassi Ketola. In the quarters, they lost 5-7, 6-4, 6-2 to Stanford's Scott Lipsky and David Martin, the No. 2 seeds who went on to lose in the championship match.

"John and James played really well and could have beaten the Stanford team if they had gotten a few breaks," Scarpa says. "They were as good as anybody there."

The Furman duo has been good from the very start. Cameron has played No. 2 for the Paladins since his freshman year, while Chesworth started at No. 5 and moved into the No. 1 position his junior season. They have played No. 1 doubles together since they were freshmen.

They have also roomed together since their freshman year — and helped each other through occasional bouts of homesickness. Chesworth came directly to Furman from Burnley, Lancashire, England, while Cameron, a native of Harare, Zimbabwe, attended the Baylor School in Chattanooga, Tenn. Both their families have made frequent trips to the United States to watch them play.

"I've gotten homesick at times, but nothing serious," says Chesworth, who has been known to shave the initials FU into his scalp for big matches. "I love it here. People are friendly and it's made me feel welcome. Every time I drive through those front gates after we come back from away matches, I tell myself how lucky I am to be playing tennis and going to school here."



CHARLIE REGISTER

Steady James Cameron (left) and hard-serving John Chesworth have combined to post a record of 55-27 during their first three years as doubles partners at Furman.

Scarpa can be forgiven if he's already looking forward to next year. Chesworth and Cameron will both be back, as will the nucleus of a team that went undefeated in regular-season Southern Conference play but lost to East Tennessee State in the tournament finals.

"John and James should come into the year ranked fairly high," Scarpa says. "They're All-Americans, which will allow them to get into a few prestigious tournaments. They'll be fun to watch."

Chesworth and Cameron are looking forward to next year, too, and they like their chances of being one of the best doubles teams in the country. But they don't have any individual aspirations beyond that.

"Our priority next year is to win as a team — to win the conference and go to the NCAA tournament," Cameron says. "We would far rather do that than be successful in singles or doubles."

— Vince Moore

Dunigan, women's program tapped for top honors

Megan Dunigan '02, who advanced to the second round of the 2002 NCAA tennis tournament and finished 25-0 in the 2002 regular season, was named the Southern Conference Female Athlete of the Year.

Dunigan, the first four-time Player of the Year (1999-2002) in any sport in league history, led Furman to 44 consecutive conference wins and to four regular-season and tournament titles. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate in mathematics-computer science, she was also one of 29 athletes from across the nation to receive an NCAA Postgraduate Scholarship in recognition of her success in the classroom and on the court.

At Furman, Dunigan was the Furman Bisher Academic-Athletic Scholar and the

Carol Ney Women's Tennis Scholar. She has enrolled in graduate school at the University of North Carolina.

In addition to Dunigan's individual honors, the women's athletic program won its 10th straight Germann Cup as the best all-round program in the Southern Conference. The competition is based on points awarded for each team's finish in regular-season or tournament competition for each sport in which the conference offers a championship. In 2001-02, Furman compiled 85 points, outdistancing Tennessee-Chattanooga (78.5) and North Carolina-Greensboro (74.5).

In the men's Commissioner's Cup competition, Appalachian State won for the 11th year in a row.